



Cleveland Works. © British Steel Archive Project

Standing The Test Of Time: The British Steel Collection

An exciting new family history resource will be showcased at the National Family History Fair. Project manager Dr Joan Heggie tells us all about it

Did one of your relatives migrate to the Teesside area in the 19th century to work in the iron and steel industry? If they did, the British Steel Collection may contain

information useful to your research. Using business archives to fill in the gaps of knowledge about a relative is a great way of putting flesh on the bare bones of a family tree. However, many such archives

remain in company ownership, if they have survived at all, and information about the contents and public access to the records can be limited.

The British Steel Collection (named after its donor British Steel plc) was gifted to Teesside Archives in the early 1990s but lack of funds, staff and space meant that it remained inaccessible to the public. Care and attention has recently been lavished on this significant

Fifty separate companies are represented in the British Steel Collection dating from the 1840s to the 1970s

industrial collection relating to the iron and steel industries in and around Teesside in the north east of England and the catalogue of its contents is due to go online within the next few weeks.

British Steel Archive Project

Teesside University and Teesside Archives formed a partnership in 2007 and were successful in gaining Heritage Lottery Funds. Together with funding from Corus and Community trade union, as well as other grants and donations, the British Steel Archive Project, which started in 2008, is due to finish at the end of 2010. The British Steel Collection is a wonderful resource, which, after months of sorting, cleaning, re-packaging and cataloguing, can finally be accessed by the public. Paper catalogues are already available in the search room of Teesside Archives in Middlesbrough, and the project is well on its way to providing an electronic online catalogue of the entire collection.

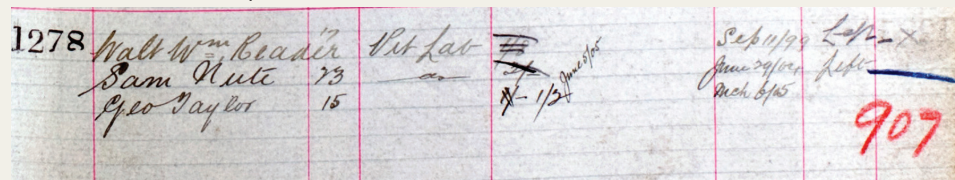
In total, 50 separate companies are represented in the collection, dating from the 1840s to the 1970s. Some names may be familiar, such as Dorman, Long & Co Ltd, Bolckow Vaughan & Co Ltd, Cargo Fleet Iron Co Ltd, South Durham Steel & Iron Co Ltd and Bell Brothers Ltd. The bridge and construction side of Dorman, Long & Co Ltd built many famous structures around the world, such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Tyne Bridge in Newcastle and the Forth Road Bridge in Scotland. Other companies represented within the collection may be less well known, such as Teesside Bridge & Engineering Ltd, the Wensley Lime Co Ltd or the North Cleveland Ironstone Co Ltd.

The Records

The collection contains a huge variety of records, from the

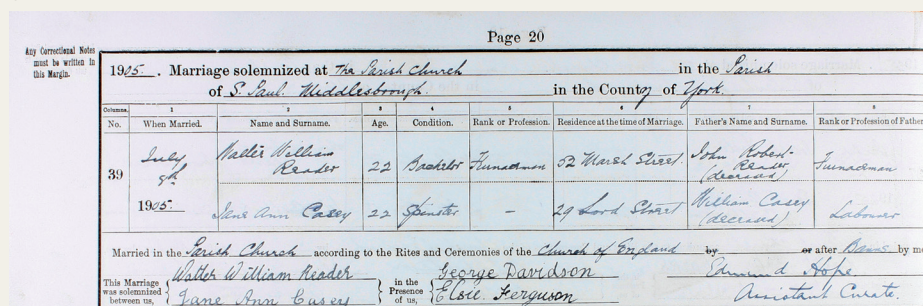
Case Study Pit Labourer Walter W Reader

COCHRANE & COMPANY opened the Ormesby Ironworks in 1854, principally for the production of cast iron pipes. There were four blast furnaces and a large moulding shop on the banks of the River Tees. Volunteers from the British Steel Archive Project have indexed the names of foundry employees in all four of the Ormesby Furnace Registers. The four Register Books, held in BSC files 2164 to 2167, cover the period 1882–1919 and appear to record which job was allocated to each worker, probably connected to how their wages were calculated. However, these registers are useful sources of information for family historians as they contain details such as the worker's name, age, trade, dates of employment and sometimes even the date and cause of death. Using this information as a starting point, a picture of one of the workers has been built up.



WALTER W READER'S entry in the staff Register Book for the Ormesby Ironworks.

'Walt Wm' Reader is recorded in the Register as a Pit Lab (Pit Labourer) aged 17 who started work on 11 September 1899. The Register also notes that he 'left'; however, no date was given. Using this information Walter William Reader was located in the 1891 and 1901 census returns. Born in North Ormesby, he is recorded as single in 1901, working as an iron founder, and living at 17 Louisa Street in Ormesby with his widowed mother Sarah Ann Reader, his elder sister, four younger siblings and his grandfather William Moxon. Further exploration into Reader's life, using records held in the wider collections of Teesside Archives, reveals that he married Jane Ann Casey on 8 July 1905 in St Paul's parish church in Middlesbrough. His occupation was given as 'Furnaceman'.



Like many other workers from the area, Walter William Reader served during the First World War. The North Yorkshire War Memorial Roll of Honour records that Private WW Reader (20943) of the Yorkshire Regiment died on 3 March 1919 aged 37. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records that his grave is in North Ormesby Cemetery, Middlesbrough. In 1922, his widow, Jane Ann Reader, 37, went on to marry William Jefferson, 37, a Stevedore of North Ormesby, at Middlesbrough Register Office.

traditional legal and financial documents you would expect of a business archive, to thousands of blueprints, maps and plans concerning the mining, engineering and construction work undertaken (there are over 1,500 on the Sydney Harbour Bridge alone). About 25,000 images exist, many of them in glass plate negative format, and volunteers are working with the project team to digitize and upload these to the project website for people to view.

Some employment records, such as salary books and

pension contribution records, are included in the collection, although the number and scope of these vary by company. Some companies have not retained staff records at all, while others have. Many of the more recent records are subject to access restrictions under the Data Protection Act 1998 but older sources of information about employees may be freely available. Press cuttings, deeds books and share registers, as well as the traditional business records like minute books, are other potential sources of

INFORMATION

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The opportunities for employment attracted all sorts of people to the Teesside area

THE 1949 edition of Dorman, Long & Co Ltd's company magazine.

Case Study Company Secretary Erasmus Darwin

TEESSIDE'S INDUSTRIAL INFLUENCE stretched far and wide during the 19th and early 20th centuries and the opportunities for employment attracted all sorts of people to the area. One such person was Erasmus Darwin, the grandson of Charles Darwin, who came to Middlesbrough in 1908 after being appointed Assistant Secretary at Bolckow Vaughan & Co Ltd, one of the original companies to set up in Middlesbrough when iron ore was discovered there in the early 19th century.

In the company's records, Special Minutes show that Erasmus Darwin was interviewed several times for the job and was thought to be 'a gentleman likely to develop into an efficient assistant to the Commercial Manager & Secretary'. According to Bolckow Vaughan & Co's Salaries Book, he was appointed initially for one year at a salary of £500 per year, payable quarterly.

With a background in mathematics and engineering, Erasmus Darwin seemed to settle into his job well, and by 1911, at the age of just 30 years, was considered capable of taking over as Secretary of the company. At the annual Ordinary General Meeting of company shareholders held in Manchester, the resolution declares that Darwin 'belongs to a family to whom the doctrine of "the survival of the fittest" is a tradition and we may take that as a good omen for the survival of the firm he has chosen for the field of his labours'.

In 1913, the board minutes record that Erasmus was asked to go to America with Dr JE Stead, the eminent metallurgist, to assess the commercial viability of a business opportunity. This journey is confirmed by checking the New York passenger lists digitized on the Ancestry.co.uk website, which show the pair departing from Southampton aboard the SS *Philadelphia* on 26 April 1913 and returning into Liverpool a month later on the SS *Baltic*.

| | | | |
|----------------|----------------------------------|------|----------|
| Darwin Erasmus | Visit to United States, 1913, | 60 | 72, |
| Dr | Service with Territorials. | 160, | 222, |
| Dr | Understudy to, Successor to, | 171 | 191, 222 |
| Dr | Vote of sympathy with relatives. | 222, | |

Immediately upon the outbreak of war in 1914, Erasmus volunteered for the Army and was commissioned into the 4th Battalion of Alexandra, Princess of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment (Territorial Force) along with many others from the area. The battalion was commanded by Colonel Maurice Hugh Lowthian Bell, son of Sir Hugh Bell and one of the directors of Bell Brothers Limited, another prominent iron and steel manufacturing company from Teesside.

Sadly, within days of arriving at the front, 2/Lt Erasmus Darwin was killed during an attack on enemy lines on 24 April 1915. The company was informed and, at a Board of Directors' Meeting on 29 April, recorded 'the loss the Company had thereby sustained' and the desire of the Board to 'convey to Lieutenant Darwin's parents the expression of their deep sense of such loss and their profound sympathy with his relatives in their sad bereavement'.

Erasmus Darwin's body was buried near a farmhouse in the area of St Julien near Ypres. He is remembered on the Menin Gate, as well as on the War Memorial in Saltburn-by-the-Sea, where he resided prior to the war.



information for the family historian, containing as they do information about events, the companies' business dealings and people.

Shareholders came from all over the country and abroad. Share information is particularly informative about women, as details about a female shareholder's marriage were recorded in company share registers. Likewise, when a shareholder died, his or her shares were often transferred and information about the death, executors, date of probate and administration was recorded in these registers.

Dorman, Long & Co Ltd





started issuing an annual magazine to its employees in 1947 and continued until nationalization in 1967. A regular feature was an update on staff who had received long service awards. Often accompanied by images of each worker, this is an invaluable resource for family historians.

Location is Key

Perhaps you don't know which company your relative worked for – what can you do then? Well, the catalogue of each company's records provides a useful overview of when it was established and the location and



name of its works. Using census information together with historical maps of the area can be productive as many employees, especially manual labourers, lived in the immediate vicinity to where they worked. Communities sprang up around the ironworks at, among others, Grangetown, South Bank, Port

Clarence, Newport, and houses were built at Dormanstown to accommodate the increasing labour force at the Redcar works.

The many images in the collection demonstrate the everyday conditions most workers experienced, and emphasize the young age that many started in the industry. Others illustrate the dangerous working conditions and the immensity of the technology being operated.

In February 2010 the last blast furnace on Teesside was mothballed and it seemed that 175 years of iron and steel manufacturing was finished. The future of the blast furnace is in the balance but the steel industry remains a significant presence in the area with the coke ovens at South Bank, the beam mill at Lackenby and works at Skinningrove and Hartlepool.

Ensuring the important industrial heritage of this area is preserved and made accessible to the public is the legacy of the British Steel Archive Project. For more information about the British Steel Collection and the project, visit www.britishsteelcollection.org.uk.

YOUNG BOYS working in the Teesside Bridge works in 1937.

© British Steel Archive Project



DR JOAN HEGGIE is a research fellow at Teesside University. As well as heading up the British Steel Archive Project, she is currently researching the life and art of Viva Talbot, a wood engraver, whose album 'Steel Making Woodcuts' was discovered in the British Steel Collection.

All images courtesy of Teesside Archives.

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MANAGERS AND OFFICE STAFF of the Teesside Bridge works, c1910-1920. © British Steel Archive Project